

THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

Vol. IX - No. 7

BROOKLYN COLLEGE — BROOKLYN 10, NEW YORK

October, 1947

Detroit Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Association will be held in Detroit Monday, December 29. It will be a dinner meeting at which our President, Professor Odell Shepard, will be one of two speakers. The meeting will be held in the Bagley Room of the Hotel Statler at 7:00 P.M. In order that members may also hear the address of the President of the Modern Language Association if they desire.

Reservations should be sent to Professor Leo Kirschbaum, Dept. of English, Wayne University, Detroit, Mich. Cost \$4.00.

Further details of the CEA Annual Meeting will appear in the November issue of the NEWS LETTER.

The Association will operate its Appointment Bureau at the Statler in Detroit December 29, 30 and 31.

National Meetings

W. Va., and N. Carolina, Nov. 7. On Saturday, November 1, at Lynchburg, Virginia, the Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina Sections will be the guests of Randolph-Macon College. Professor Cleanth Brooks will be one of the featured speakers. Professor F. Flournoy Washington and Lee Univ., Lexington, Va., is in charge of the meeting. Professor Flournoy is President of the Section.

Rocky Mountains M.L.A. and C.E.A., Nov. 28-29

The first meeting of the Rocky Mountain M. L. A. and C. E. A. will be held November 28-29 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The University of New Mexico will be the host. The program follows:

November 28, 1947 (Friday)

11:00 A.M. Registration, Student Union Building.

Committee: A. R. Lopes, Katherine Simons.

12:00 N. Luncheon. La Placita, Old Albuquerque (American, \$1.35, Mexican, \$1.00).

(Special tables for members of American Dialect Society, National Association Teacher of Spanish, French, etc.).

W. M. Kercheville, in charge.

4:00 P.M. Modern Language Association: Meetings for Papers.

8:00 P.M. English Research Papers: Group Meeting - Before 1900.

(Continued on Page 3)

Bread and Butter Note

In this first issue of the NEWS LETTER published at Brooklyn College, the Executive Secretary wishes to thank President Harry D. Gideonse, in behalf of the Association, for his gracious hospitality to C. E. A.

Notice of Dues

The editor has received from the treasurer a list of members who have not paid dues in 1947. Each member on that list will receive a notice with this issue of the NEWS LETTER. It is hoped that members who receive notices will take prompt and appropriate action.

Just How Bad Are They - And How Bad Are You?

Nothing seems to delight a teacher of English more than a good old-fashioned cry (in print, of course), and no subject is considered more delightfully, automatically, incriminatory than OUR STUDENTS: "Our students are all illiterate, and ain't it a shame."

If our students are all illiterate, then we are all bad teachers, and we had better get ourselves a new job instead of advertising our inefficiency. But I should like to submit a minority report suggesting that we are doing a far better job than is generally believed.

A former colleague of mine devised an interesting experiment some time ago. Thirty unselected second-semester Freshmen were put to re-writing short passages written by recognized scholars and published in the learned journals of our trade. The students were allowed a half hour to revise two hundred and fifty words, and the work of the fifteen best was placed (in a mimeographed pamphlet) beside the fifteen original passages.

The pamphlet was sent to a jury of ten interested people: a teacher of high school English, a teacher of College Composition, a Dean of a liberal arts college, a city editor, an editorial columnist, an advertising executive, a librarian, a literate businessman, a professional critic, and a good amateur poet. All of the judges considered all of the Freshman revisions superior to the original versions.

Detailed results obtained from this experiment (which were carefully destroyed for personal reasons which do not concern either me or

these) indicated that the average Freshman can write occasionally with more skill than some of his most famous teachers do write habitually.

I have devised variants of the same experiment — testing Freshmen against commencement speakers, best selling novels, Hearst editorials, advertising copy, business letters (successful), and slick magazine fiction. And the Freshmen still look good.

Now I don't mean to say that all Freshmen write well. I know they don't. I have corrected in the course of what I laughingly call 'my career' at least 100,000 freshman themes, and I can truthfully say that most of these attempts to write English left me the same feeling that I presume I would get after a brisk workout in the salt mines. Wading through the prose of the average college student is much like wading waist deep through glue on a muggy day.

But it isn't just Freshmen who don't write well. No one writes well without effort, without great effort. Thomas Mann has been quoted as saying he cannot turn out finished copy any faster than fifty words an hour. You don't find many Freshmen willing to spend an hour writing fifty words. Freshmen feel that such care in the choice of the proper method of expression is just a waste of time. And I hope that I don't sound too cynical when I say that I think it would be hard to demonstrate the error of such a conclusion.

Sometimes a student happens along who doesn't need a demonstration. He works over his composition because he takes a pride in it, because he wants it right and not just written. He won't hand in a piece until he is satisfied with it . . . and he won't make Phi Beta Kappa either.

In college today undergraduates are too busy writing term papers to ever dare cross out a line and rephrase it; so, I see no reason why teachers of English should become upset about the way their one-time part-time students express themselves. Naturally a hurried rough-draft doesn't compare favorably with the finished prose of Addison, but I'm not sure that Addison, all things considered, could follow the pace set for my Freshmen by the school, and which they have seen fit to further synopsate for themselves.

Frank Sullivan,
Loyola University
of Los Angeles

Prof. Millett Replies

I am very sorry that circumstances have made it impossible for me to reply at any earlier date to Professor Malone's article ("Ph. D. Reform: Where Lies the Danger?" CEA Newsletter, March 1947), but perhaps even at this late date, some readers may be interested in my response to this good-natured attack.

Professor Malone's arguments seem to run as follows:

(1) Linguistics, bibliography, and the historical-bibliographical study of literature are perfectly legitimate fields of study and, therefore, they should not be discouraged.

(2) But, even though these fields of study are legitimate, the results of one's studies in these fields "had better be kept in a minimum in undergraduate teaching."

(3) Since Professor Malone attacks the history of these approaches to literature (Partisan Review, March-April, 1947, pp. 298-311) and since my article demands more systematic philosophical training for graduate students, one or both of us must be wrong.

(4) The teacher "with his head full of graduate-school esthetics and critical theory" is likely to make Chaucer more rather than less repellent to undergraduates.

Before attempting to answer these arguments, I should like to summarize my position. The problem that I was raising was an eminently practical one: since most of the men and women who take the doctor's degree in English are going to spend their lives teaching undergraduates, what could the graduate schools do to make their training more relevant to the teaching of literature and their teaching of literature consequently more illuminating? My answer to the question was that the ends I have just stated might better be achieved if graduate schools emphasized bibliographical, linguistic, and historical-bibliographical training less and philosophical and aesthetic training more, and if graduate schools gave primary emphasis to that approach to literature that is the most relevant and illuminating, the aesthetic-critical. I was suggesting, not the suppression of any of the traditional modes of graduate-training but a basic re-distribution of emphasis.

(1) I, therefore, find myself completely in agreement with Professor Malone's first argument.

(Continued on Page 3)

THE NEWS LETTER

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Membership in the College English Association, including THE NEWS LETTER, \$2.00 a year. Subscription for Libraries, \$1.50.

Suggestions . . .

Recently the editor has received suggestions for strengthening and enriching the NEWS LETTER.

Why should we not have more accounts of unconventional courses which have proved successful? And accounts which suggest why these courses have taken. Why should we not have more descriptions of successful teaching methods: good approaches for particular books and stimulating presentations of standard material?

Why should there not be more literary criticism in the NEWS LETTER? Why not an occasional lecture, popular or semi-popular? It is true that there are limitations of space, but these are more flexible than they were once.

The editor will welcome material of the sort mentioned above, and any material from college English teachers about college English teaching. Our Association will be the more profitable for us all, the more fully we are associated.

A New Statement

In response to criticism of the present statement of CEA's purpose, a member has proposed the following new one. It has been approved by the directors, and is now presented to the membership. Comment is invited. Editor.

THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION is an organization of literary scholars in their capacity as teachers. It is concerned with the place of letters in the American college, and with the preparation of college teachers of English in the graduate school. Its aim is to pro-

vide opportunities for discussion of these topics at annual meetings (held in conjunction with the M.L.A.), at state or regional meetings, and in the columns of its monthly journal of news and opinion received by all members.

By group action the members of the Association hope to make more effective their belief that liberal education is essential to moral and intellectual progress in the modern world.

Gleaned From The Mail

Dear Professor Fitzhugh:

I have just completed the reading of Volume IX - No. 7 issue of THE NEWS LETTER. I am very much impressed with the progressive leadership of the College English Association as revealed by the selection of articles in your publication.

Since there are several articles in the September issue which would be of particular interest to our staff, I am writing to inquire whether or not it would be possible to secure 80 copies of the September issue. In addition to focusing their attention on certain articles in that issue, I would at the same time like to acquaint the members of our staff with the News Letter.

Paul D. Bagwell, Head
Dept. of Written and Spoken English
Michigan State College

Professor Millett Replies

(Continued from Page 1)

(2) His second argument is a very feeble defense of the prolonged and exhausting program of graduate study we require of our Ph. D's. It seems to come down to this: what one learns in graduate schools will really do no harm provided the teacher keeps it out of the undergraduate classroom where most of his professional activity takes place. Most victims of the Ph. D. process, unfortunately, are rendered permanently incapable of keeping what they have learned in graduate school "to a minimum in undergraduate teaching."

(3) Professor Malone would not have used Professor Chase's attack on the history-of-ideas approach to literature as a weapon against me if he had really understood what the latter was driving at. In the first place, Professor Malone assumes that the history-of-ideas study of literature and a training in philosophy are identical. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In the second place, what Professor Chase is objecting to is exactly what I object to, the making primary a way of studying literature that ought to be kept at least secondary. As a matter of fact, Professor Chase and I are fundamentally in agreement as to the primary emphasis the undergraduate teacher of literature should maintain. He says: "Anyone who understands literature instinctively regards a poem as unique, a thing

in itself (though of course, he must regard it in other ways too). If it does not do this, how can it ever occur to him that art has reality? How, in the most comprehensive sense of the word, can he read the poem or teach anyone else to?"

(4) Professor Malone's opinion that graduate training in aesthetics and criticism is "the most dangerous" method of graduate study certainly gives his whole show away. His attractive account of his own method of undergraduate teaching makes it clear that his primary concern is, as he says, "to read literary texts with his students, and to help them to appreciate the literary values (emphasis mine) in these texts," "to see to it that the students understand what they are reading and get the particular stylistic flavor characteristic of each author." His purposes in teaching literature to undergraduates—and here I agree with him completely—are, in other words, interpretation and evaluation. But neither Professor Malone nor anyone else can either interpret or evaluate a work of art except in the light of a conscious (or unconscious) aesthetic and theory of criticism. Professor Malone is apparently perfectly satisfied to remain unconscious of the principles in the light of which he is acting or at any rate to keep his students in ignorance of those principles.

Fred B. Millett
Wesleyan University

A New Scholarship

I should like to approve wholeheartedly, though belatedly, the discussion of the Ph.D. in the News Letters of last spring. Like many others I believe that any attempt to escape the heavy Germanism of the graduate schools is a step forward. It is only the great importance of this subject that prompts me to stress a point or two which has not been mentioned in the discussion.

Professor Millett states that the graduate schools "do an excellent job" in bibliography, linguistics, and literary history. However, in the training in these three divisions of literary study lurks a danger, or at least a disadvantage, upon which much disapproval of the Ph.D. is based. In each division the student is encouraged to acquire information without achieving any genuine understanding of language or literature. In the graduate school which I attended, linguistics, for instance, was taught as a series of phonological and morphological puzzles; no mention was ever made of the social and psychological aspects of language. We piled up paradigms and believed we were of the saved. Yet the chief value of the scientific study of language to the student of literature is the increased understanding of its role in society and

in human thought.

The same danger is found in the graduate school method of teaching literary history. Here also the student is expected to rake together masses of fact without being trained to consider what light they may throw on any literary work or on the process of making literature. Quantity of information seems to be the generally accepted ideal. Yet in the study of literature this does not lead, I submit, to vital scholarship, which can hardly be divorced from understanding, from intellectual and spiritual sympathy with literature, from the sort of insight shown by the ablest literary critics. Most graduate students in literature, even the ablest, I dare say never progress beyond the fact-collecting stage. No wonder it is a shock for them to face a group of sophomores and to find that the notes taken in their graduate seminars are somehow of little use.

In the overemphasis upon the quantitative, then, American graduate schools have notably failed to encourage the best type of literary scholarship. But this is the negative side of the picture. On the positive, one suspects that the objections of Professors Warren, Millett, and Spencer are the symptom of a desire for a redefinition of literary scholarship. This unrenewal among teachers of literature is a revival of the old struggle between historians and aesthetes.

That contest has long ago ceased to have validity. The desire for new sort of literary scholarship has its origin in deeper issues than contest over points of view. It arises from the impulse to make the study of literature as important in the culture of our time as it deserves to be. But its redefinition, I feel, awaits the coming of a great critical scholar. If he is already alive but as yet unknown, you may assure that he is not buried in the dust of Widener copying book notice from obscure eighteenth century magazines.

Paul E. Reynolds
Rhode Island State College

\$750, \$1000, \$1200, \$1500

An announcement to the editor from the Curtis Publishing Company makes an attractive offer to professors to turn their spare time into cash. The announcement reads in part, "New short-story contributors to the Ladies Home Journal (and the Post and the Country Gentleman, apparently) will be paid, as at present, a minimum of \$750. But if, within a reasonable time we purchase a second story, the minimum price will be \$1000. For the third story, \$1200 and the Fourth, \$1500. Thereafter the author must negotiate directly with the editor. Mention the NEWS LETTER when submitting MSS.

The "Ideal" Load: Semi-retirement

Professor Cline is quite right in assuming that my use of the word "ideal" referred only to the apparently accepted standard of a "fair" load. It was dictated by the form of the questionnaire used. Hence, I have no disagreement with his letter, and I am, indeed, happy to have provoked his generous expansion of my closing paragraph. Dare I remark that many of my colleagues and I have carried more than this standard "ideal" for many years, plus many other duties and assignments; and that to me Professor Cline's ideal would seem like semi-retirement.

William O. Clough,
University of Wyoming

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I've Been Reading

Members are invited to contribute reviews of books, old or new, which they wish to call to the attention of other English teachers. Professor J. Gordon Eaker, the Assistant Editor, is in charge of I'VE BEEN READING. He is Head, Department of English, Jersey City Junior College, Jersey City, N. J.

FUNK AND WAGNALLS NEW COLLEGE STANDARD DIC- TIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

Emphatype edition. Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1947. 1404 pp. \$5.50 and, with thumb index, \$6.90.

P R O

The indispensable reference book is a good dictionary. Not only does it keep spelling straight, clarify meanings, suggest synonyms, and supply etymologies, but it also gives a great mass of useful factual data.

Such a book is the latest edition of the "College Standard Dictionary." To the solid merits of earlier editions, this one adds several others. All main entries are arranged in a single alphabetical list; biographies, important place names, and significant events must no longer be sought for in separate lists.

An attractive new bold-face type has been designed for the lead words. Accented syllables are underlined; an accent mark indicates stressed syllables in words of several syllables. Respelling to indicate pronunciation has been kept to a minimum; the phonetic system is based upon a normal interpretation of English spelling.

The vocabulary is particularly commendable. Not only is there an excellent representation of the terminology of all fields of learning, technology, trade, and industry, but there are themes and motifs of the world's folklore, the divinities and heroes of mythology, and the names of important persons, places, and events. Some popular and vulgar terms are included, and the level of usage is indicated. Certain terms like the verb "jew" are marked "an offensive usage," and others like "dago" are designated "a vulgar usage."

The definitions are clearly and simply written. The familiar or most common meaning of an entry is given first. For ready reference purposes this arrangement is excellent. The care with which this part of the work has been completed is apparent in the extensive revision of the entries in the previous edition. The etymologies are succinct but adequate for a work of this scope.

Harry R. Warfel,
Pennsylvania Military College

C O N

In some ways this edition is an improvement over the old College Standard. The earlier edition, for example, gave a pronunciation of "oleomargarine" that no grocery clerk in the country could possibly recognize. This edition very sensibly recommends the so-called soft "g." Again, "oboe" is here pronounced the way musicians and all other people speak it. "Fahrenheit" now begins with the vowel sound of "fat" in place of German "ah." "Ratel," formerly explained as "a nocturnal carnivore (genus Mellivora), ash-gray above and black below," now has a helpful "resembling a badger" added to it. The vocabulary has been brought up to date by the inclusion of new words like "radar" and "penicillin," unfortunately "streptomycin" was omitted, though "streptothricin" appears.

In other ways this edition is no improvement over the old College Standard. In a dictionary specially designed for "the general reader" it is odd to find that a bear is "a large plantigrade carnivorous mammal (family Ursidae) with massive body and short tail." "Interesting" is still listed as a four syllable word. Under "and" appears the warning "Incorrectly, to; as, try and stop me." Such pedantry is entirely out of place in 1947; see Pooley, *Teaching English Usage*, pp. 132-3. It is also a sad comedown from the earlier College Standard, which said "and may be used as a common or colloquial equivalent of to used with the infinitive—try and go."

Worst feature of all is the EM-PHA-TYPE. Pronunciation keys have been badly handled by American dictionary makers (See "Confusion Worse Confounded," *College English*, May, 1947); here the confusion is complete. No key is repeated throughout the book; in fact no key is necessary, for this "revolutionary simplified system gives pronunciation—at-a-glance." Then the unfortunate reader is confronted with un-keyed WHIT and WHITE. The nearest help on differentiating the sounds of these words is 1336 pages away. So, too, the use of caps for all entries should prove to be a great time-waster for people using the book. He who has grown used to seeing "dog" in print will have difficulty recognizing DOG here, unless, perhaps, he is still in kindergarten.

I am at a loss to explain how this dictionary won the approval of the distinguished scholars comprising the Editorial Advisory Committee (p. iv). On second thought, I wonder whether it did?

George S. McCue,
Colorado College

Barrows Dunham: *Man Against Myth* (Little Brown, 1947).

When I first read *The Tyranny of Words*, I was struck by the fact that I could find some meaning in passages which Stuart Chase

assured me semanticists found merely a succession of blanks. Particularly was this true of certain of Hitler's speeches. Since those who had listened to Hitler had already started shooting, before they got around to shooting at those who had read Stuart Chase's book, I was puzzled enough to go to the fountainhead of semanticism to see whether I could discover the reason for this curious attention to the meaningless. I got Count Alfred Korzybski's *Science and Sanity* but soon discovered, what with his bars, little numbers, etceteras,

Leonard S. Brown

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I've Been Reading

(Continued from Page 3)

and his style, that I was baffled by large sections of his book. But I discreetly held my tongue for I was surrounded by admirers if not by readers of the book. At about this time I became actively engaged in dodging torpedoes, bombs, and bullets launched at me by men who had been convinced by propositions that to Chase were meaningless, and the whole semantic problem became somewhat academic.

One of the first books that I read after I returned was Barrows Dunham's *Man Against Myth*. The book is a discussion of ideas which form the partly unconscious mental furniture of people. The subtle defend these ideas with subtlety, the illiterate mouth them with complacency. Everyone will recognize all of these propositions. You can't change human nature; the rich are fit and the poor unfit; there are two sides to every question; you cannot mix art and politics; you cannot be free and safe.

But best of all, from my point of view, was Chapter IX: "That All Problems Are Merely Verbal." Dunham shows that the semanticists make the very error they are always inveighing against in their analysis of the law of identity. They are always warning us not to confuse the thing with the word; they note the constant change in the thing (a rose is not always or often a rose) and suppose that the term is inadequate because it does not indicate such change or change with the object it points to. Hence, by the time you have got to the second is in the proposition whatever is, is, the whatever has changed its identity and definitely is not. But the law of identity means that for the time and purpose of the argument the term should mean one thing and one only. Without such supposition, discourse is impossible. How could semanticists even carry on a discussion, Dunham asks, if one of the symbols kept constantly changing meaning?

All of the chapters are worth reading. It just happens that the onslaught against the semanticists gave me greatest delight. Perhaps the author shows his dislike for Fascists a little too frequently, but that is a fault even among men who fought against them. The book, as a study of social mythology, is not all negative. The author has a mythology which he wishes to substitute for the prevailing one and which sometimes he defends with the same vigor that he brings to the demolition of the ancient and outmoded. I find it hard to quarrel with his defense of liberty, fraternity, equality as social ideals, and I am certainly delighted by his exposition of the way this honored slogan has backfired in the hands of those who constructed it.

Dunham brings to his task penetrating wit, precision, and grace. Primarily the book appeals to men as citizens, but English teachers will be charmed to find that its author can quote Shakespeare exactly and modern poets pertinently, in a word, that it is literate. They, whatever sociologists and logicians may think, will not find such a quality a work of supererogation.

Franklin D. Cooley
University of Maryland

Norman Foerster, *American Poetry and Prose*, Third edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1610 pp., \$6.00.

American literature is honored by the dignity and magnitude of the new edition of this text edited by one of its leading scholars. Professor Foerster has here anthologized for the first time noted recent works, including the whole of T. S. Eliot's "Waste Land." It will be difficult to compile a volume to compete with it, in completeness, typography, and clarity.

The new labels here proposed for the periods - The Puritan Mind, The Age of Reason, The Romantic Movement, The Rise of Realism, Realism and Naturalism - reflect both the influence of Parrington and the author's own critique of naturalism, which pervades the volume. The naturalists are given plenty of space in which to plead their case. As one turns the pages toward the present day, one wonders, indeed, what constructive faith American letters have to offer to the world today.

The answer is undoubtedly found in the old standbys, one of whom has been omitted because he seemed hackneyed, though some who have lost stature, like Bryant and Whittier, occupy less space than formerly. A teacher who wishes to tackle our current confusion will find the abundant contemporary selections available in a separate volume, or he can order the whole in one or two volumes.

What a stimulation American minds have given to the world. From Franklin's scepticism through Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" to William James's "What Pragmatism Means," one will find here all the amazing energy that is America. But one looks in vain for anything from as typical an American as William Allan White.

J. G. E.

Bruce McCullough, *Representative English Novelists: Defoe to Conrad*, New York: Harper and Brothers, \$2.75.

Everyone loves the novel. This is the book to add to the enjoyment of both teachers and students. It is not a history of the novel; in many ways it is better than that. Mr. McCullough has chosen twenty novels as represen-

tative of their types and has written a scholarly essay on each, rich in comparisons with other novels, and each making pertinent references to other works by the same author. The writer's background reading has been thorough and rewarding.

What students need is help in getting more ideas about the characters, the construction, and the technique of the novels that they do read. This book will establish such live spots in one's mind, whether about the famous *Clarissa Harlowe*, Scott's *Old Mortality*, or the modern realistic efforts of George Moore in *Esther Waters* and Arnold Bennett in *The Old Wives' Tale*. The chapter on James's *The Ambassadors*, called "The Novelist in Search of Perfection," is splendidly done in the very spirit of James, and helps to explain his popularity to-day. Each essay reflects the unique flavor of the novel studied.

Since each chapter emphasizes one aspect of the novel not elsewhere treated at length, there is little repetition. The style is a happy medium between the formal and the chatty. The book should make a fine text for a year's course in the English novel, whether these particular novels are taught or others.

J. G. E.

The September *NEWS LETTER* was numbered Vol. IX, No. 7. It should have been No. 6. Librarians please note. The present, October, issue, is correctly numbered.

Do not stifle that impulse to write the editor.

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Regional Meetings

(Continued from Page 1)

Chairman: E. F. Chapman, University of Utah.

3:00-4:00 P.M. Group Meeting - 19th Century and Contemporary Literature.

Chairman: H. G. Merriam, University of Montana.

Modern Language Research Papers.

2:00-3:00 P.M. Group Meeting - Linguistics.

Chairman: Adolphe J. Dickman, University of Wyoming.

3:00-4:00 P.M. Group Meetings - Literature.

Chairman: John Brooks, University of Arizona.

4:00-5:00 P.M. General Meeting.

Topic Resources for Advanced Study in the Rocky Mountain States.

Chairman: Levette Davidson, University of Denver.

Panel Discussion.

7:00 P.M. Banquet, Hilton Hotel (\$2.50).

T. M. Pearce, in charge.

Speaker: Ernest Hunter Wright, Columbia University.

Subject: Toward Another Renaissance.

Discussion.

Informal get-together, mezzanine November 29, 1947 (Saturday)

9:00-10:00 A.M. General Meetings: The General Literature Program in College.

Chairman: George McCue, Colorado College.

10:00-11:00 A.M. Group Meetings - Problems in the Teaching of English in High School and University.

Chairman: Wilson O. Clough, University of Wyoming.

Group Meeting - Problems in Teaching of Modern Languages.

Chairman: R. M. Duncan, University of New Mexico.

11:00 A.M. Business Meeting: election of officers, committees, etc.

12:00 M The conference officially closes.

....Those who wish to make reservations for rooms should get in touch with Dr. W. P. Albrecht, Chairman of Housing, Univ. of New Mexico.

New England, Oct. 17-18

The New England meeting will be held Friday and Saturday, October 17 and 18, in Boston, at Northeastern University. The program follows:

Friday Afternoon, October 17

Session 1. Time: 3:30 p.m.

Place: Richards Hall, Room 200.

Subject: "The Objectives of Teaching Composition on the College Level."

Chairman: Maxwell H. Goldberg, University of Massachusetts.

Panel: Marcel Kessel, Univ. of Connecticut.

Sydney R. McLean, Mr. Holyoke.

Walter L. Simmons, Rhode Island State.

George M. Sneath, Boston University.

Session 2. Time: 4:30 P.M.

Place: Richards Hall, Room 200.

Subject: "Aesthetic Judgment."

Speaker: F. Cudworth Flint, Dartmouth College.

Friday Evening, October 17.

Session 3. Time: 8:00 P.M.

Place: Science Hall, Room 228

Speaker: Dr. Theodore Spencer, Harvard University.

Subject: "The Importance of General Education in the Humanities."

Chairman: Frederick W. Holmes, Northeastern University.

Saturday Morning, October 18

Session 4. Time: 10:30 A.M.

Place: Richards Hall, Room 200.

Subject: "Colloquy on Thoreau's Walden and on How to Teach it"

Chairman: Robert M. Gay, Simmons College (retired).

Panel: Morse S. Allen, Trinity College.

Osborne Earle, Wheaton College.

David P. Edgell, Simmons College.

FLASH

The following officers were elected. Other reports of the meeting in later issues.

President: Sydney McLean, Mt. Holyoke.

Vice-President: Walter Simmons, Rhode Island State College.

Secy-Treas: Howard Bartlett, M.I.T.

Advisory Committee: Denzil Bagster-Collins, Springfield College.

H. L. Flewelling, Univ. of Maine.

Some English Rumination

As a teacher of English, I am much given to rumination these days; and I am also much interested in the thoughts and reactions of my English colleagues, as I find them expressed, for example, in that revealing and helpful brochure, *The News Letter*. . .

The "king's English" has been losing prestige in the classroom and out of it in these latter years. In reality, too often we hear not English at all but a jargon of abbreviations, coinings, slang, nonsense. Listen to group-conversation, in almost any setting, and you will see and hear what I mean. This jargon-English in undoubtedly one deplorable result of our present system of education, a system "wandering between two worlds," the world of the three R's and the world of the three M's. Reading, riting, rithmetic, versus, mechanism, modernism, money. It would be wisdom right now to take the first two R's, put them back to work in the classroom again hard and fast; and then watch for the results. We teachers of English can appreciate those results already: consistent growth in literacy, in correct speech in intelligent communication, ever in correct behavior. I would also advocate a grammar class in jump-

high school, at least two periods a week. Grammar is preparatory English and a logical prerequisite to intelligent reading and writing.

It seems that many educational commentators believe we have a sufficiency of reading already in our classrooms. Frankly, I disagree. And, furthermore, much of this assumed reading is of the "skimming" type, judging from results all around us. Is there any subject in our curriculum as potentially educational as literature is, or can be, if properly approached, properly presented? I doubt it. Literature is a rich storehouse of thought, ideology, emotion, action, and the revealing circumstances associated therewith, a storehouse verily that will develop and leave enduring impressions on the receptive hearts and minds of youth if teachers do their duty.

Because of its inherent educational efficacy, literature in the classroom should be wisely chosen; if not, then much of the reading done will often mean little more than time and energy expended on worthless matter.

"Skimming" could be obviated to a great extent by cultivation of the second R, that is, writing. Short written reports on the specific matter read, short written summaries; and better still, short but frequent written tests will keep students on the alert, make them conscious of what they are reading; and develop grammatical, intelligent phraseology, not at all of the "sort of," "kind of" type.

Recently, I heard a truly revealing debate on the subject of liberal education as it looks today. What was the conclusion? To put it briefly it was that liberal education is now fairly stagnant, English and its exponents in a muddle. And why? Because there is too much noisy, high-flown theorizing in the modern pedagogy, too many fantastic ideas that will never materialize into anything worthwhile. And what was the remedy suggested? That all those concerned must get right down to rock-bottom, examine in detail our present, educational set-up, note, one by one, its many weaknesses; and then obliterate them by combined, constructive effort upwards to the light. Our English departments, possibly the most vital unit in liberal arts, are not up and doing; their standards are lowered, their clientele looking on, too often with limp and folded arms. Many teachers of English are incapable and unprepared. Not a bright outlook, this; and if we want to avoid even a darker one let us get busy today; tomorrow, examine ourselves, our methods, our achievement; and then make the necessary changes for the better. Finally, the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts—"hopeful, aspiring, potential, golden thoughts. Teachers

of English, whether it be grammar, composition, or literary appreciation, are naturally the principal cultivators of these thoughts. What an inspiring labor this actually is—to cultivate, day by day, the living, breathing essence of true education and bring it to full fruition! Can teachers of English do it? Absolutely. Will they do it? That remains to be seen.

Sister M. Brigetta (McCarthy)
College of St. Scholastica
Duluth, Minnesota

BOOK NOTE

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College and High-School Cooperation In North Carolina

To bridge the gap between high-school and college teaching of English in North Carolina, a committee of the North Carolina English Teachers Association has begun a systematic exchange between state high schools and colleges of information on students' performances in English. The first exchange between a test group of five colleges and twenty high schools occurred in September 1947. To give time for evaluating and improving the procedure, the supervising committee will not enlarge the test group until after September 1948. Thereafter all high schools and colleges of the state will be invited to participate.

The senior English teacher of each participating high school has her college preparatory seniors, near the end of the school year, fill out at her dictation forms supplied her by the supervising committee. These forms, in addition to the student's name, high school, date, and senior English teacher's name, show for the eleventh and twelfth grades only the chief literary works (by types) read in course, the number and length of themes written, and whether or not they were fully read and graded by the teacher and corrected by the student. The senior English teacher holds these completed forms over the summer until she learns which of the participating colleges each student has entered. She then writes the college name in a space provided for it, and sends all forms to the committee.

Before transmitting these completed forms to the proper colleges the committee tabulates the information they bear for later analysis and presentation to the North Carolina English Teachers Association in a general conference or through its journal. As soon as possible after the autumn opening of colleges, the committee sends the completed forms to the director of the colleges the students have entered. The director, after such use as he wishes to make of the forms, places them in the hands of the instructors teaching the students who filled them out.

The procedure intentionally bypasses the offices of the high-school principal and the college dean to establish direct contact between the high-school senior English teacher and the college English instructor. Made acquainted with one another this way, they can exchange further information if they wish.

That is half of the process. The other half comprises information on the student's performance in English during his freshman year which the colleges send to high schools by the same direct channel. The college report lists the names, alphabetized under the high-school

comes state-wide, and when the names which are also alphabetized, of all students who during the college year entered the college from the participating high schools. For each student are supplied total raw scores and percentile rankings on the English entrance or placement test, as well as raw scores on separate parts of the test; raw scores and percentile rankings on any other entrance or placement test bearing upon English, such as a Reading test; and grades earned in each semester of Freshman English.

Colleges prepare these reports during the summer. Shortly after high schools have opened in the autumn, the director of Freshman English sends a copy of his report to the senior English teacher of each high school represented on the report, and a file copy to the supervising committee. Each report shows to the high school receiving it the performance of graduates of all high schools.

The benefits of such an exchange should be obvious. Foremost in the minds of the committee is the creation of a direct channel for a two-way flow of information. The usual relationship between high-school and college teachers of English, as CEA members well know, ranges from mutual aloofness through mild belligerency to recrimination and abuse. It lacks foundation in factual knowledge and is productive of nothing but ill-will. This exchange supplies some of the facts needed to establish the quality of English instruction offered by each high-school English department to each college entrant. Not all of the significant facts, for present high-school forms provide no space for reports on speech, spelling, grammar, or vocabulary work. Fortunately the college placement test will reflect training in all of these except speech. The high-school English teacher will know how good her teaching has been, at least as judged by several forms of objective placement tests and the much less objective grades in Freshman English in a number of colleges. She can—and probably will—compare her results with those of neighboring and rival high schools, as can of course college officials as well. With her constantly refreshed knowledge of what it takes to get into college and stay there with credit, she can work with her college preparatory students with greater assurance.

College Freshman English staffs have had too little exact information about the preparation of incoming students. They have probably diagnosed results of placement and entrance tests for guidance in shaping the syllabus of Freshman English. Such diagnosis provides graphs and curves useful in reappportioning large blocks of material, but offers little help in reading Alf Elder's theme or spurring him to

higher literary standards in private conference. The grade exchange will show exactly what Alf did in his last two years of high-school English. College staffs, could, if they would, read the generalized prescriptions for high-school English in the state syllabus. (Actually, they rarely take the trouble to do so, even when, as recently in North Carolina, the English Teachers Association sent a copy of the state *Language Arts Bulletin* with a covering letter urging use of it to the chairman of each college English department in the state.) Such bulletins, however, set forth precepts in general terms. The individual high-school report gives facts of actual practice.

Confronted by many such reports from high schools all over the state, supervisors of public instruction and organizations such as the English Teachers Association can observe the extent to which general requirements of the state syllabus are given specific application in the classroom. Any persisting discrepancy between precept and practice will indicate points at which revision of the syllabus is in order.

The cost of the exchange in money and labor, while only a few institutions experimentally take part in it, is light, and is assumed by the participants. The high-school English teacher, provided with the blank forms, need only have students fill them out at her dictation, later add one or two words to each form, and then mail them all at one time to the supervising committee. The committee mimeographs an instruction sheet for the high school and college, blank high-school forms, and letters of transmittal. Forms, instruction sheets, and letters must be mailed to twenty high schools, and an instruction sheet and letter to five colleges. When completed high-school forms are returned, the committee will need clerical help for tabulating results, sorting them according to college, and mailing them to the college. We have had too little experience to determine exact item cost at any stage.

The heaviest burden falls upon the college, and especially upon the state college. Yet the burden is reduced as soon as a system is found for assembling the information the college sends out. Already many admitting and testing officers have been assembling such information for their own purposes. Freshman English staffs usually maintain a file of semester grades for all students still in college. All that is required is to identify on entrance the students in question and then during the summer when departmental administrative work is light anyhow to assemble and mimeograph the records.

If the experiment proves its worth so that the exchange procedure has been perfected, some more suitable agency than a com-

mittee of the North Carolina English Teachers Association should assume supervision of it. It would seem that an association of secondary schools and colleges in conjunction with the state department of education would be a proper agency. When the exchange is fully established to convey information on English training, it is useful to reflect training in other fields of study such as mathematics or a foreign language.

F. E. Bowman

Supervisor of Freshman Instruction
Duke University

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